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(54) **METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR PROVIDING ENHANCED CALL WAITING**

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H04M 3/42 (2006.01)
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H04M 1/64 (2006.01)

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See application file for complete search history.

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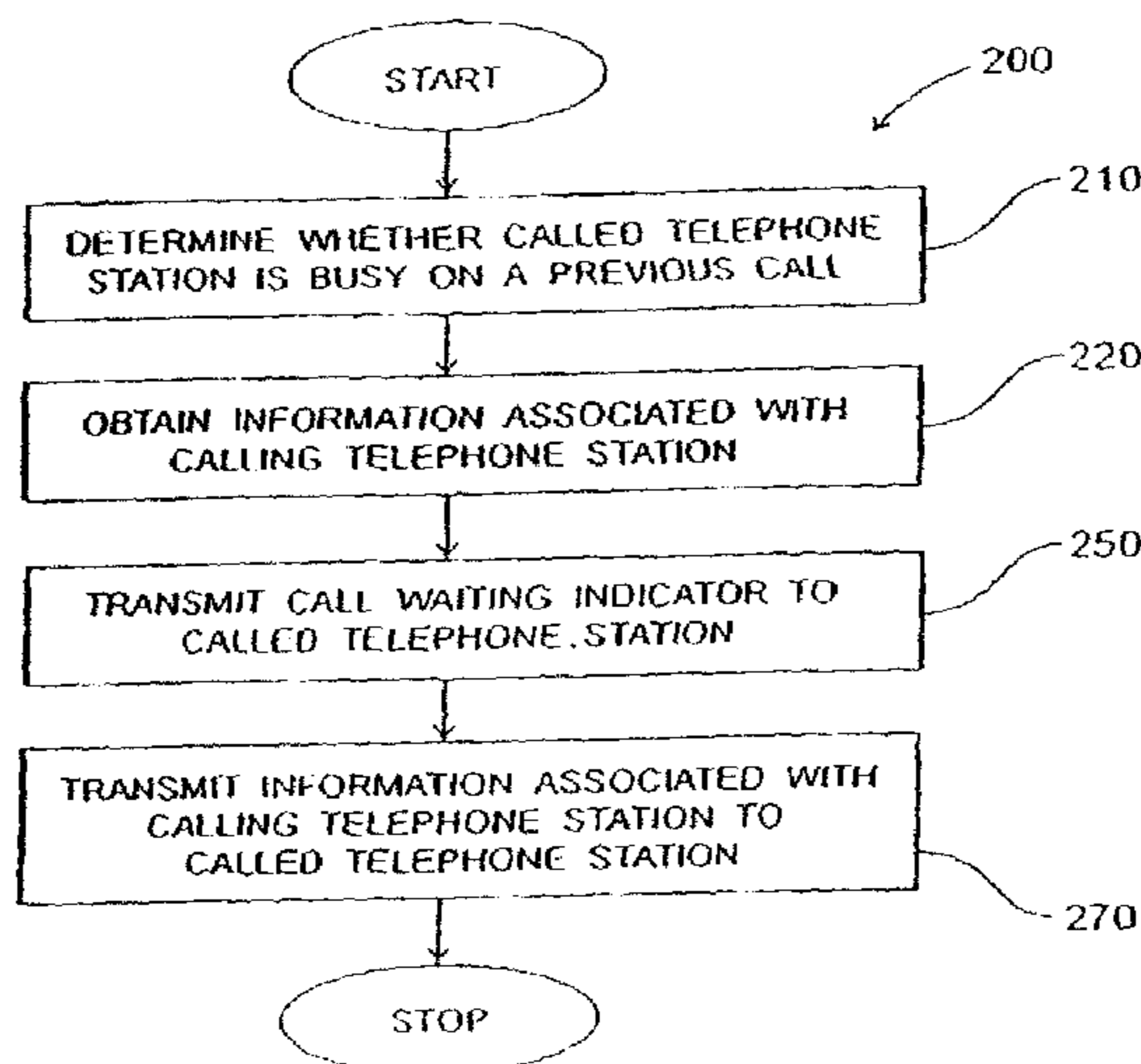
Primary Examiner — Harry Hong

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A system and method for providing information about a calling party to a called party is disclosed. Generally, a network element obtains information about a calling party when a telephone line of a called party is busy. The network element notifies the called party that the calling party is attempting to contact the called party and transmits an audible version of the information about the calling party to the called party without receiving an input from the called party.

9 Claims, 7 Drawing Sheets



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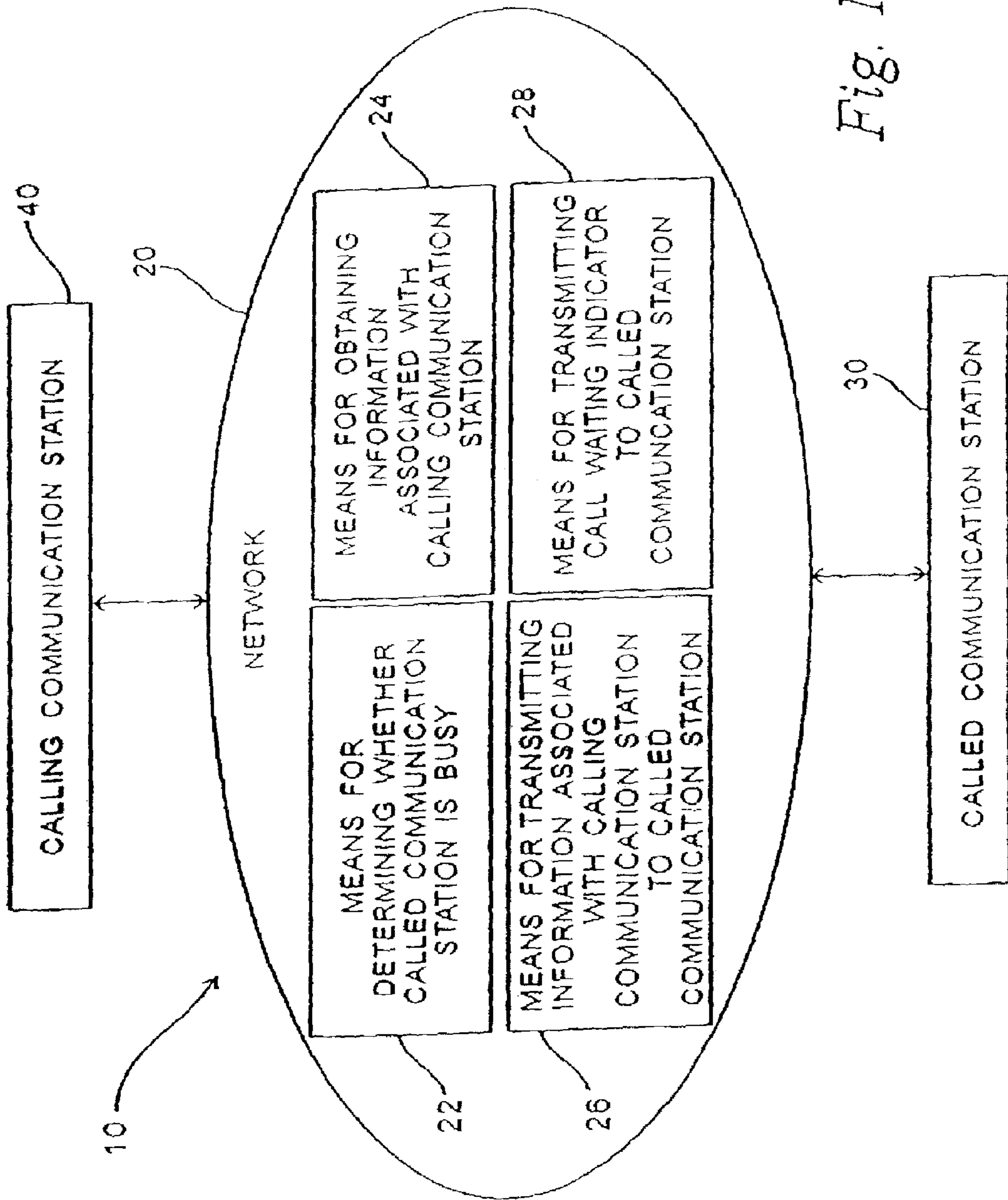


Fig. 1

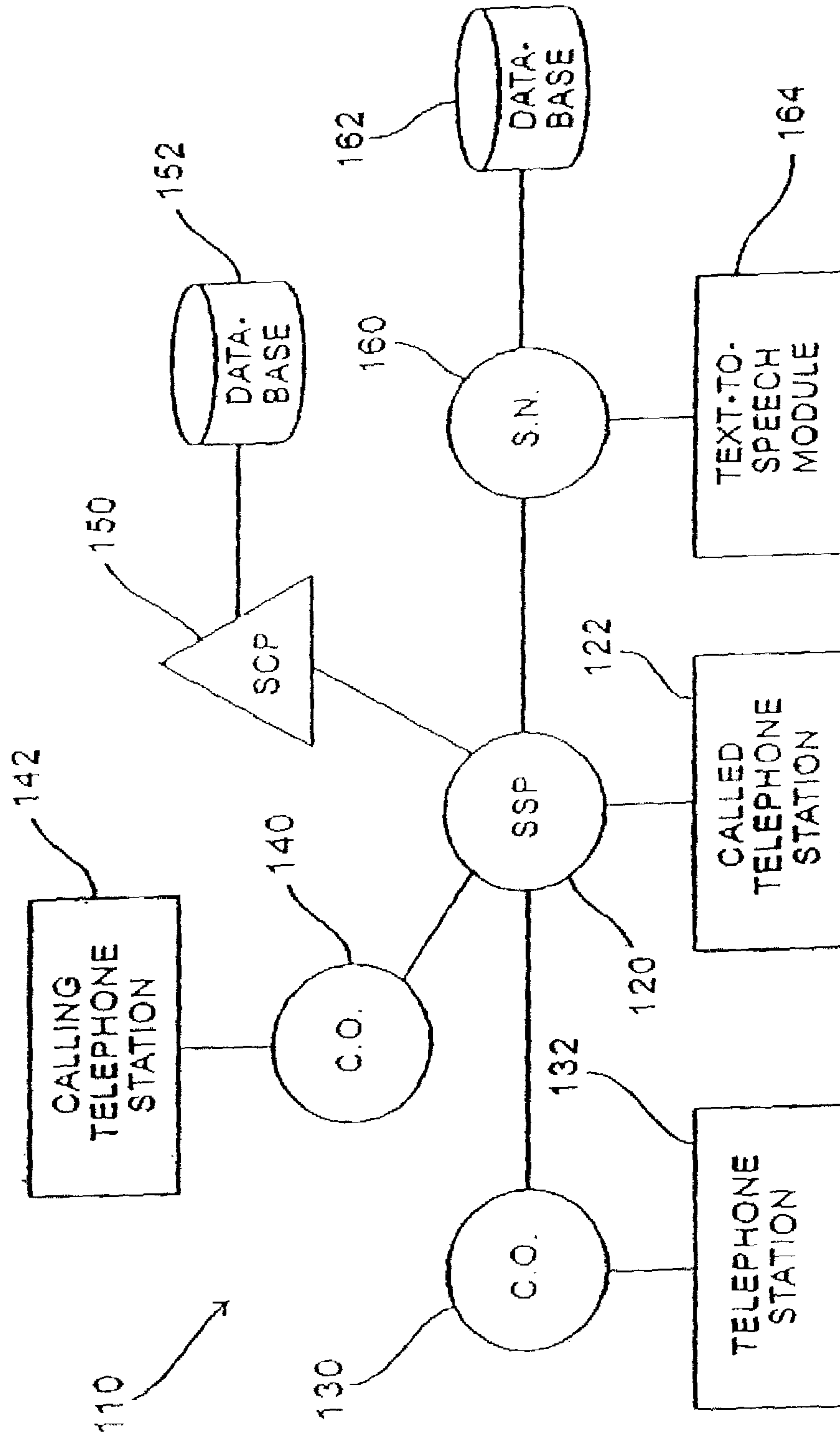


Fig. 2

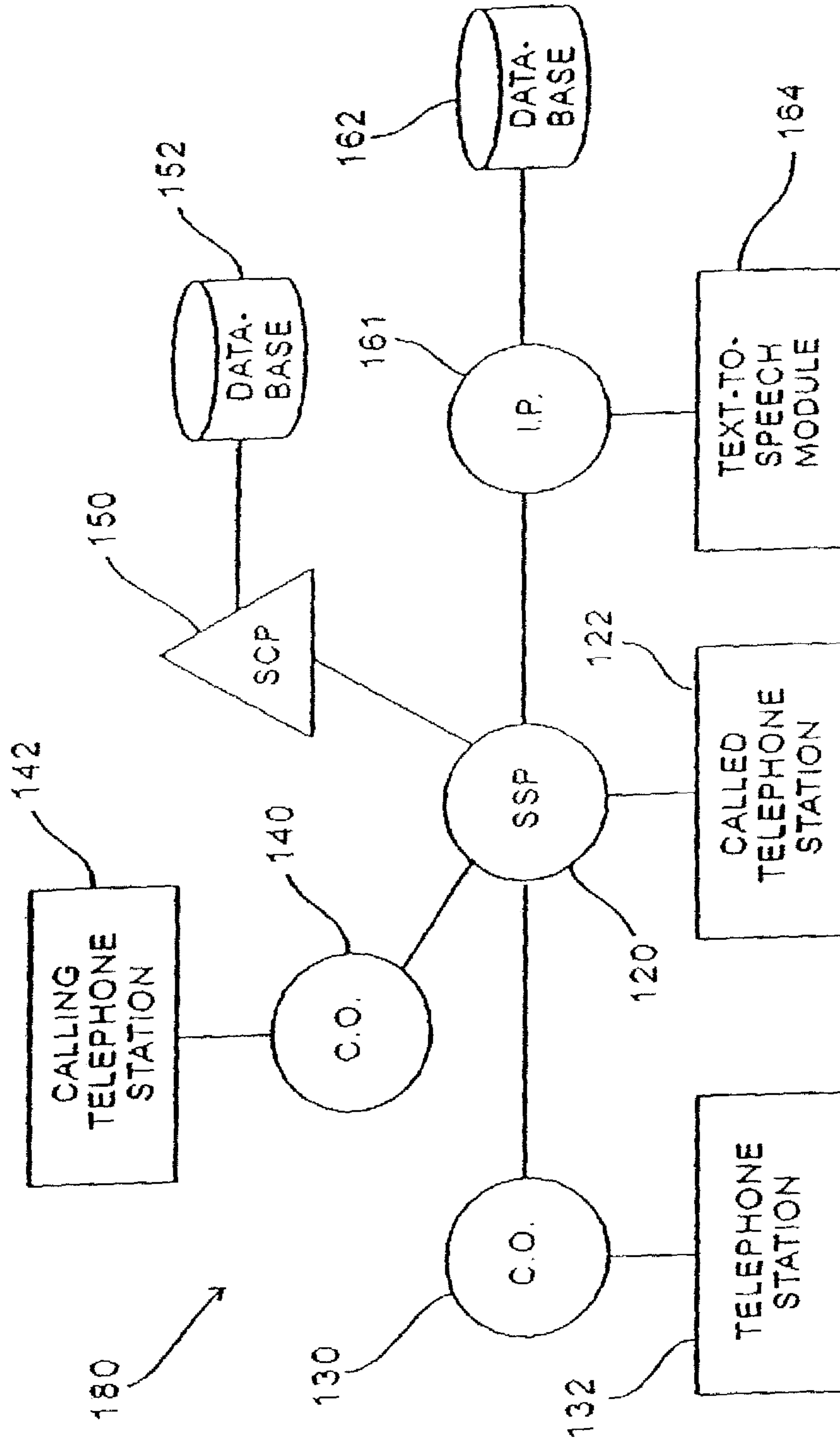


Fig. 3

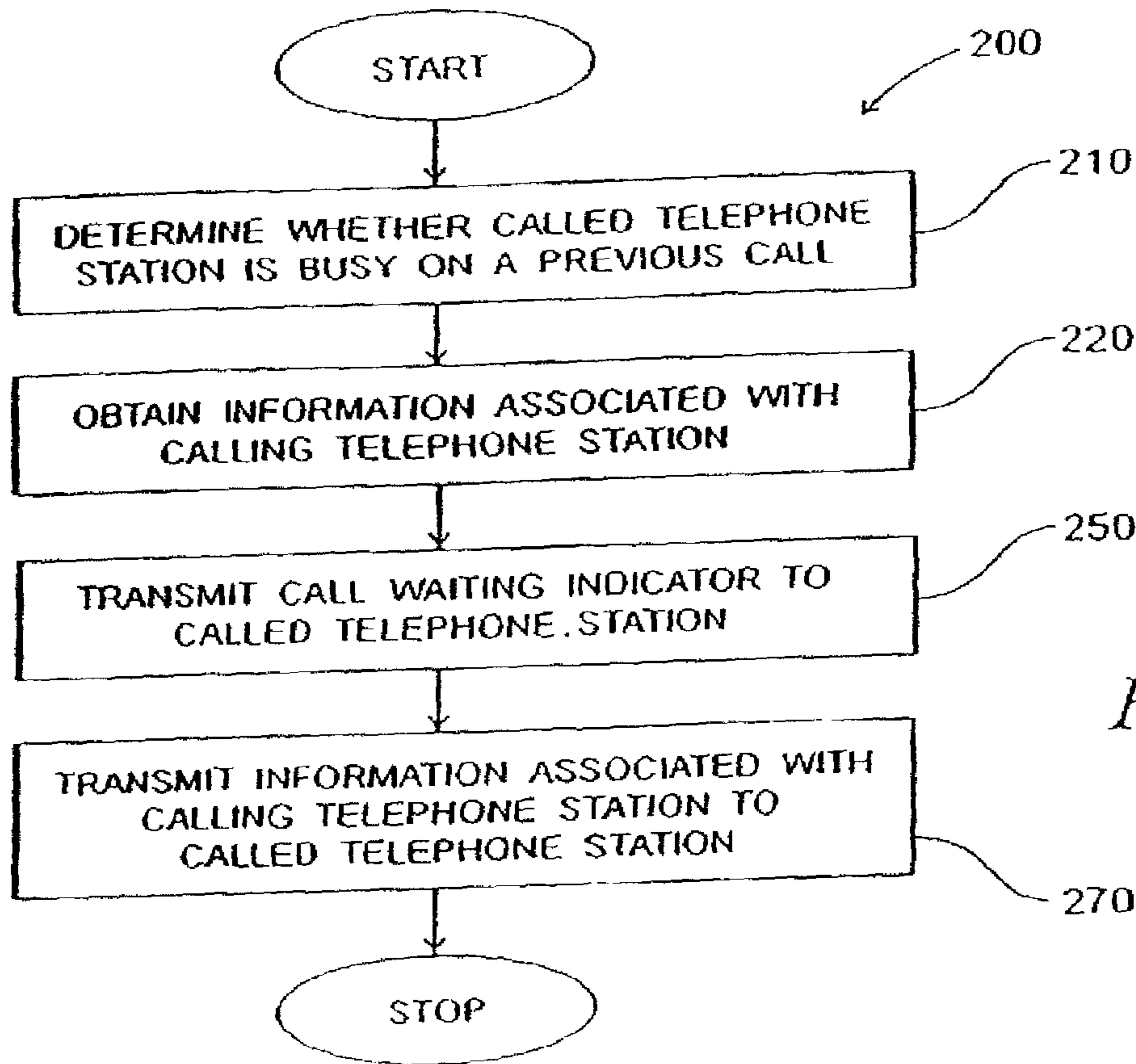


Fig. 4

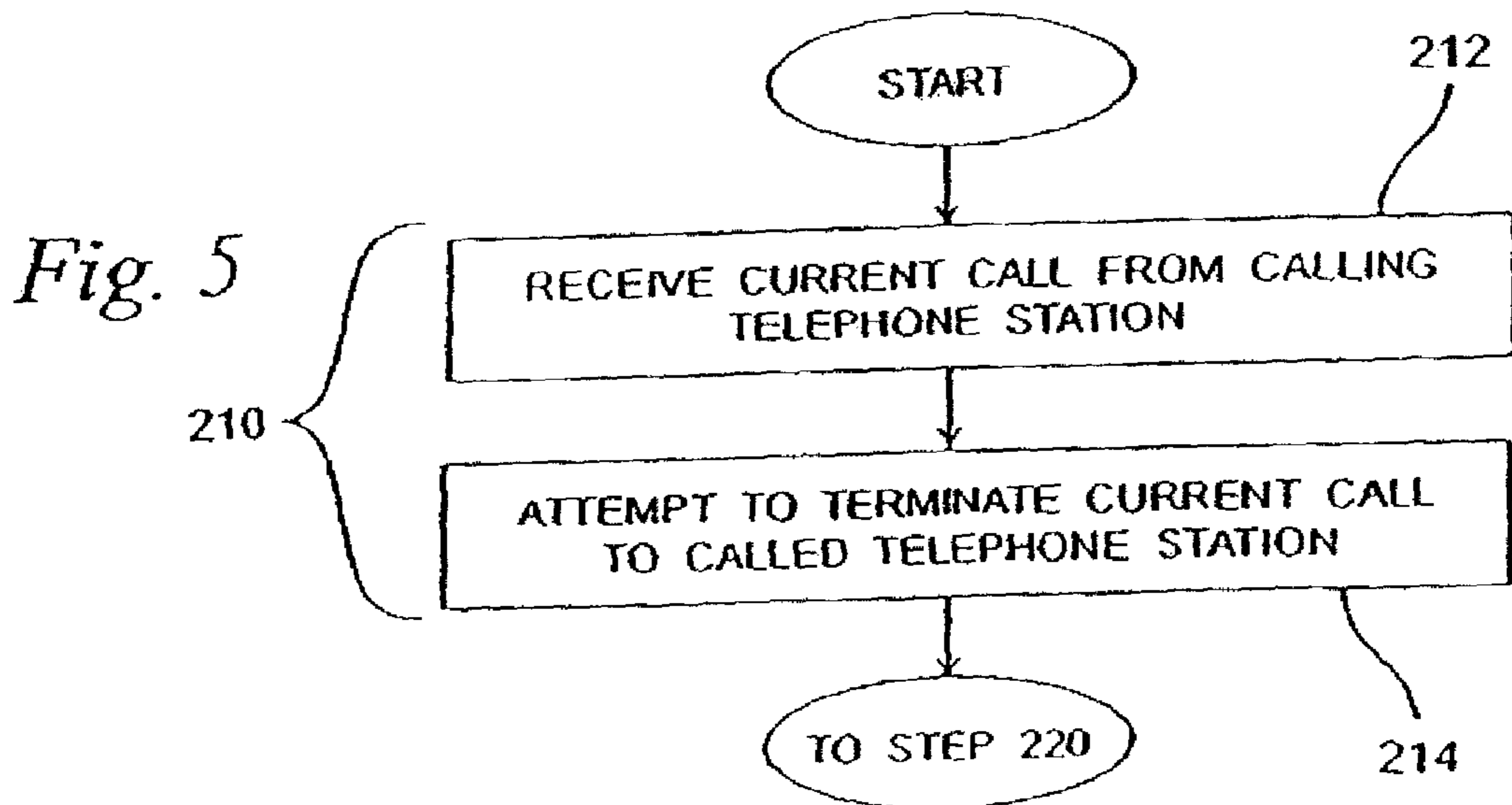


Fig. 5

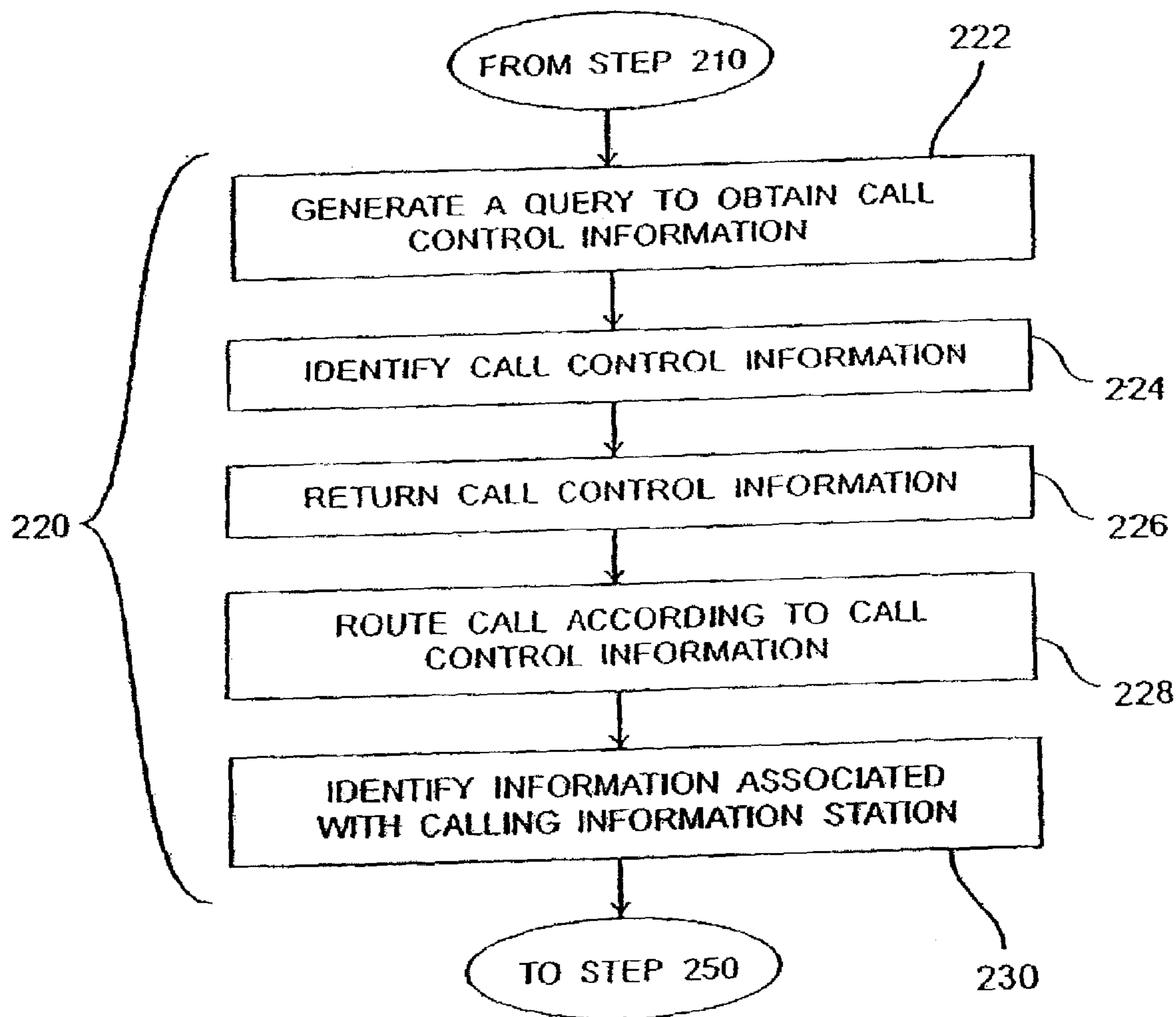


Fig. 6

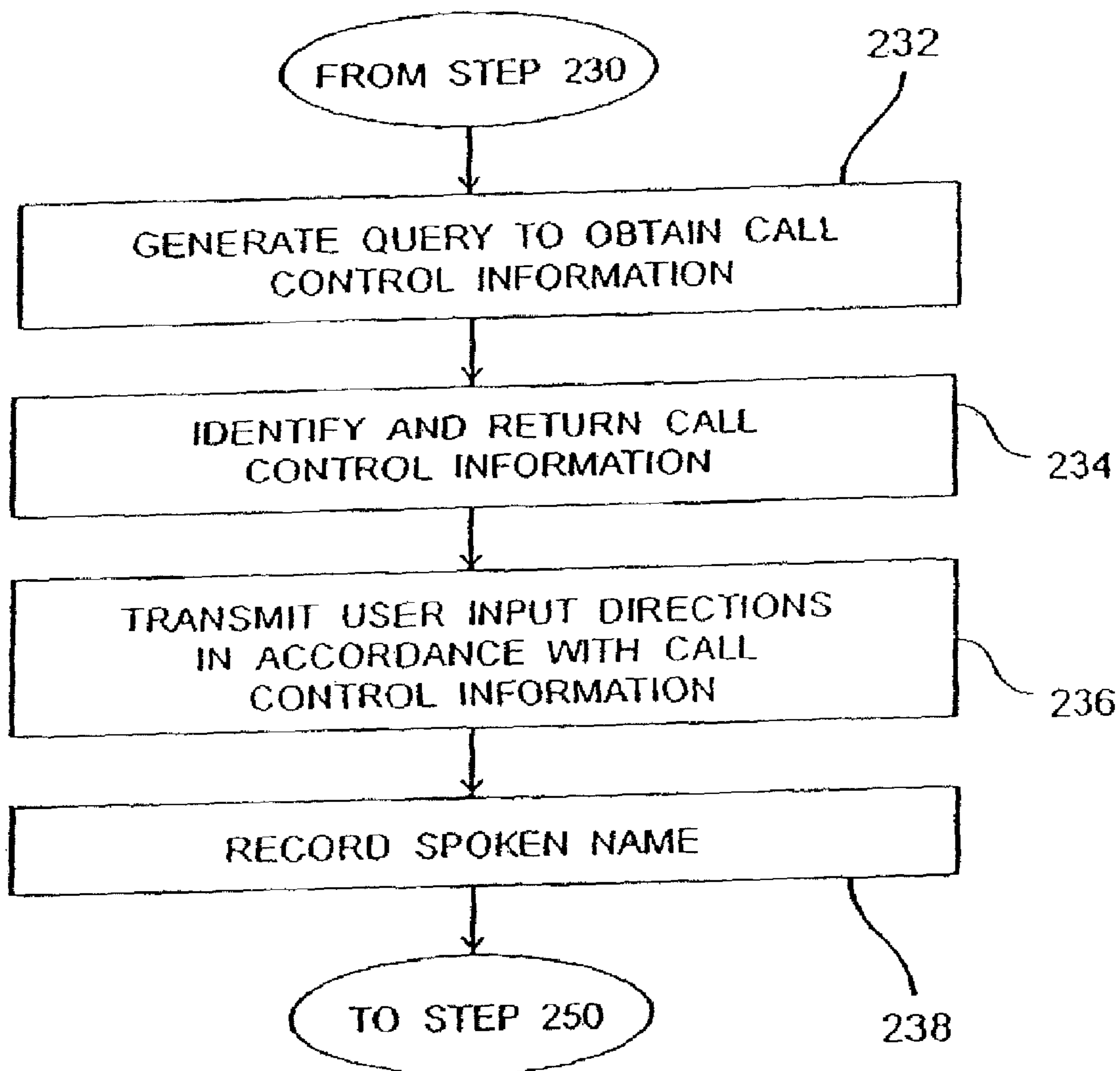


Fig. 7

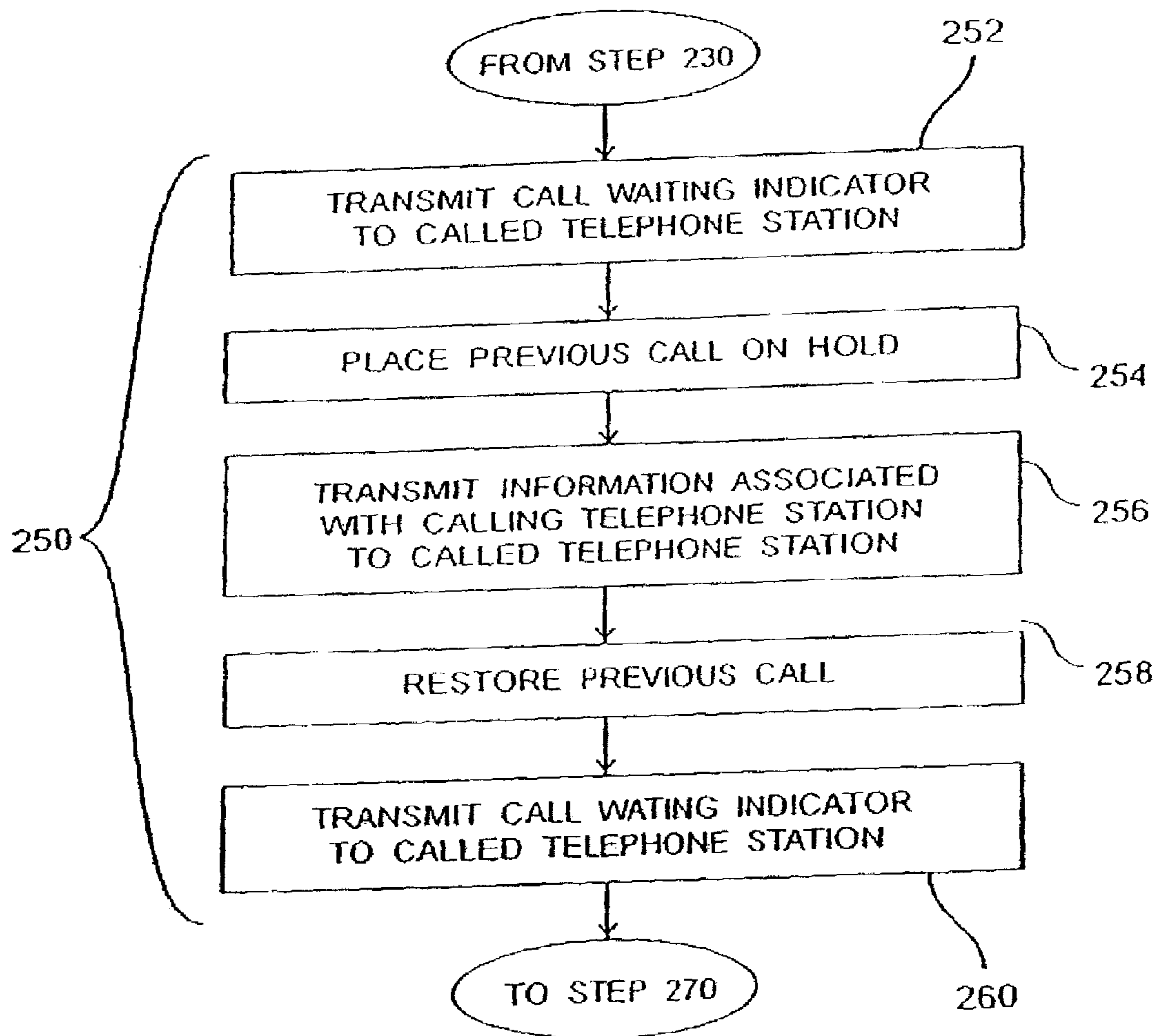


Fig. 8

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METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR PROVIDING
ENHANCED CALL WAITING

RELATED APPLICATIONS

The present application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/545,401, filed Oct. 10, 2006 now U.S. Pat. No. 7,388,952, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/978,207 (now U.S. Pat. No. 7,139,383), filed Oct. 29, 2004, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/409,860 (now U.S. Pat. No. 6,829,343), filed Apr. 8, 2003, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/716,169 (now abandoned), filed Nov. 17, 2000, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/044,574 (now U.S. Pat. No. 6,219,414), filed Mar. 19, 1998, the entirety of each of which is hereby incorporated by reference.

BACKGROUND

The present invention relates generally to telecommunications call processing and more particularly to call waiting service features.

Call waiting services are offered by numerous service providers and are well known by those skilled in the art. Call waiting services generally notify a customer that is busy on a previous call that a current call has been placed to the customer. Call waiting services commonly utilize an audible tone that is transmitted to the customer, to notify the customer that the current call is waiting. When the customer is notified that the current call is waiting, the customer can decide whether or not to suspend the previous call to take the current call. Accordingly, information about the current call aids in the customer's decision. U.S. Pat. No. 4,899,358 describes a system that provides an audible representation of the calling party's name to notify a customer that a call is waiting. This system substitutes the name in place of the tone commonly used to notify the customer. While substitution of the name in place of the tone provides the customer with additional information, delivering information in this format can result in confusion for the customer. For example, providing just the name of a caller can be confusing when the name is interjected in the middle of a conversation without warning.

Other systems provide additional information to the customer in varying formats. U.S. Pat. No. 5,309,512 describes a system that first provides a tone to indicate that a current call is waiting and then waits for a command from the customer. This system only provides the name of the calling party after receiving the command. To provide the required command, the customer completes a flash hook at his telephone station. The flash hook puts the previous caller on hold for a significant amount of time while the customer hears the name of the current caller and then decides whether or not to take the current call. Providing information in this format also creates additional problems for the customer. For example, the customer is not immediately provided with the information necessary to decide whether or not to take the current call. This results in an inconvenience for the both the previous caller and the customer, especially if the customer ultimately decides not to take the current call and returns to the previous call after a significant delay in the call.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a system for processing a telephone call of a preferred embodiment.

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FIG. 2 is more detailed block diagram of the system depicted in FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is an alternate embodiment of the system depicted in FIG. 2.

FIG. 4 is a flow chart of a method for processing a telephone call of a preferred embodiment.

FIG. 5 is a more detailed flow chart of the method depicted in FIG. 4.

FIG. 6 is a more detailed flow chart of the method depicted in FIG. 4.

FIG. 7 is a more detailed flow chart of the method depicted in FIG. 4.

FIG. 8 is a more detailed flow chart of the method depicted in FIG. 4.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

By way of example, FIG. 1 depicts a system **10** of a preferred embodiment. The system **10** comprises a network **20**, called communication station **30** connected with the network **20** and a calling communication station **40** connected with the network **20**. The network **20** preferably comprises: means for determining whether the called communication station is busy **22**, means for obtaining information associated with the calling communication station **24**; means for transmitting the information associated with the calling communication station to the called communication station **26**; and means for transmitting a call waiting indicator to the called communication station **28**.

The system **10** is preferably implemented in a telecommunications network as known by those skilled in the art. Alternatively, the system **10** can be implemented in computer network or any other network that is adapted to store and retrieve information. Each of the means **22**, **24**, **26**, **28** described above is preferably implemented through the use of computer readable program code written in any suitable programming language and implemented on an analog or digital computer utilizing any suitable operating system as known by those skilled in the art. Alternatively, each of the means **22**, **24**, **26**, **28** can be implemented through the use of hardware in the form of a hardwired computer, an integrated circuit, or a combination of hardware and computer readable program code as known by those skilled in the art. The calling communication station **40** and the called communication station **30** preferably comprise an analog telephone station as known by those skilled in the art. According to an alternative embodiment, the communication stations **30**, **40** can comprise any suitable communication station adapted for use in the present embodiments as known by those skilled in the art.

The system **10** enables a customer at the called communication station **30**, who is busy on a previous call, to be efficiently and effectively notified that a current call from calling communication station **40** is waiting. The system **10** provides an enhanced call waiting message that includes both the call waiting indicator and the audible representation of information associated with the calling communication station **40**. The call waiting indicator and the audible representation of information associated with the calling communication station can be automatically transmitted to the called communication station **30** prior to any commands from the customer. The combination of the call waiting indicator and the information associated with the calling communication station alerts the customer that the current call is waiting and provides the customer with information that assists the customer in deciding whether to take the current call.

By way of further example, FIG. 2 depicts a preferred embodiment of the system described above. The system **110**

comprises a service switching point (SSP) **120**, a service control point (SCP) **150**, an SCP database **152**, a service node (SN) **160**, a database **162**, central offices **130**, **140** and telephone stations **122**, **132**, **142**. Intelligent network system components, commonly referred to as advanced intelligent network (AIN) components, suitable for implementing the present embodiment are commercially available from Lucent Technologies and are well known by those skilled in the art. AIN components can implement computer readable program code as known by those skilled in the art. Vendors of AIN components typically have a preferred programming language and operating platform as known by those skilled in the art.

SSP **120** preferably comprises an AIN switch that routes calls, generates queries to SCP **150** to obtain call control information and responds to call control information. SSP **120** connects called telephone station **122** with central offices **130**, **140** to enable a customer at called telephone station **122** to place calls to and receive calls from telephone stations **132**, **142**. SSP **120** preferably communicates with SCP **150**, central offices **130**, **140**, and SN **160** in accordance with a signaling protocol such as Signaling System 7 (SS7) or other such signaling protocols as known by those skilled in the art.

SCP **150** preferably comprises an AIN element that stores call control information in SCP database **152** and accesses the stored call control information. SCP **150** receives queries generated by SSP **120** and preferably responds to the queries by performing database searches to locate the requested call control information. SCP **150** can forward the located call control information to SSP **120**. SCP **150** preferably comprises an AIN element as well known by those skilled in the art.

SN **160** preferably comprises a network element that stores call control information and performs call related functions as known by those skilled in the art. SN **160** receives calls forwarded from SSP **120**, performs searches or other requested functions and returns information or data to SSP **120**. In an alternate embodiment, SN **160** can be configured to produce call waiting indicators as described herein. SN **160** preferably includes a text to speech module **164** that performs text to speech conversions to produce an audible representation of the text. Such modules and conversions are well known by those skilled in the art.

Database **152** preferably comprises a data storage element for use with SCP **150** as well known by those skilled in the art. Database **152** preferably stores call control information that can be implemented by SSP **120** to control calls. Such call control information is well known by those skilled in the art.

Database **162** preferably comprises a caller identification with name database as known by those skilled in the art. Database **162** preferably stores information associated with a telephone number that is associated with calling telephone station **142**. The information associated with the telephone number preferably comprises the identity of a caller in the form of the caller's name. Alternatively, the information associated with the telephone number can comprise the identity of a caller in the form of the caller's name and the telephone number for calling telephone station **142**. The telephone number preferably comprises a 10 digit telephone number as known by those skilled in the art but can also comprise any type of identification format used to identify telephone stations. Database **162** can alternatively comprise a caller assistance database as known by those skilled in the art. While database **162** is depicted within a telecommunications system, database **162** can comprise any suitable database con-

taining information adapted for use in the present embodiment and is not limited to databases located within a telecommunications network.

Central offices **140**, **150** preferably comprise AIN network switches as well known by those skilled in the art. Central offices **140**, **150** comprise network switches that connect telephone stations **132**, **142** with SSP **120** to enable callers at telephone stations **132**, **142** to place calls to and receive calls from the customer at called telephone station **122**. Alternatively, central offices **140**, **150** can comprise non-AIN network switches as known by those skilled in the art.

Telephone stations **122**, **132**, **142** preferably comprise analog telephone sets as known by those skilled in the art. Alternatively, telephone stations **122**, **132**, **142** can comprise wireless, PCN, ISDN or any other form of communication station known by those skilled in the art.

Referring now to FIG. **3**, an alternate embodiment of the system of FIG. **2** is shown. The system **180** comprises: an SSP **120**; a called telephone station **122**; central offices **130**, **140**; a telephone station **132**; a calling telephone station **142**; an SCP **150**; an SCP database **152**; a database **162**; and a text-to-speech module **164** all as described above in reference to FIG. **2**. The system also includes an intelligent peripheral (IP) **161** that communicates with SSP **120**, database **162** and text-to-speech module **164** and performs the same functions as the SN **160** as described herein. The IP **161** preferably comprises an AIN element that acts on instructions from SCP **120**. In an alternate embodiment, IP **161** can be configured to generate call waiting indicators as described herein.

The systems depicted in FIGS. **1**, **2** and **3** can be utilized to implement the method **200** depicted in FIG. **4**. For purposes of illustration, assume that a customer at called telephone station **122** (FIGS. **2**, **3**) is on a previous call with a previous calling party at telephone station **132**. Connections are established between: telephone station **132** and central office **130**; central office **130** and SSP **120**; and SSP **120** and called telephone station **122**; to enable the previous call to be connected. Also, assume that after the previous call has been commenced, a current calling party at calling telephone station **142** places a current call to the customer at called telephone station **122**. In an attempt to connect the current call, central office **140** routes the current call to SSP **120**.

The method **200** of processing a current call from a calling telephone station **142** (FIGS. **2**, **3**) to a called telephone station **122** generally includes the steps of determining whether the called telephone station is busy on a previous call (step **210**, FIG. **4**); obtaining information associated with the calling telephone station (step **220**); transmitting a call waiting indicator to the called telephone station **122** to signify that the current call is waiting (step **250**); and automatically transmitting the information associated with the calling telephone station (step **270**) to the called telephone station **122**. Each of these steps is discussed in more detail below.

The step of determining whether the called telephone station is busy on a previous call (step **210**, FIG. **4**), preferably comprises the following steps as depicted in FIG. **5**. SSP **120** receives the current call (step **212**, FIG. **5**) and attempts to terminate the call to called telephone station **122** (step **214**). Because the customer at called telephone station **122** is busy on a previous call, the current call cannot be terminated to called telephone station **122** and SSP **120** determines that the customer at called telephone station **122** is busy on a previous call.

The step of obtaining information associated with the calling telephone station (step **220**, FIG. **4**) preferably comprises the following steps as depicted in FIG. **6**. When SSP **120** determines that the customer at called telephone station **122** is

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busy on a previous call, SSP 120 generates a query to SCP 150 (step 222, FIG. 6) in accordance with a call forward on busy feature, or other similar function, to obtain call control information from SCP 150. Call forward on busy features and other similar functions are well known by those skilled in the art. The call control information instructs SSP 120 where to route the current call when called telephone station 122 is busy. After receiving the query from SSP 120, SCP 150 identifies the relevant call control information (step 224) and forwards it to SSP 120 (step 226). The relevant call control information has been created to enable SSP 120 to forward the current call to SN 160 or IP 161 when called telephone station 122 is busy. In accordance with the call control information, SSP 120 routes the current call to SN 160 or IP 161 (step 228). SN 160 or IP 161 examines the telephone number associated with calling telephone station 142 and identifies information corresponding to the telephone number by performing a database search (step 230). The information corresponding to the telephone number preferably comprises the identity of the current caller at calling telephone station 142 in the form of the name of the current caller. Database 162 preferably comprises a caller identification with name database as known by those skilled in the art. Alternatively, the database 162 can comprise a caller assistance database as known by those skilled in the art.

In accordance with an alternative embodiment, the step of obtaining information associated with the calling telephone station 142 (step 220, FIG. 4) further comprises the following steps as depicted in FIG. 7. If SN 160 or IP 161 cannot identify and return information associated with the telephone number, SSP 120 generates a query to SCP 150 (step 232, FIG. 7) requesting further call control information. SCP 150 locates and returns call control information to SSP 120 (step 234) that enables the creation of audible caller input directions that direct the calling party at calling telephone station 142 speak his or her name. SSP 120 transmits the caller input directions to calling telephone station 142 (step 236). When the calling party speaks their name, the spoken name is digitized and recorded by SN 160 or IP 161 (step 238). The recorded name can be played back to the customer at called telephone station 122 through the use of the speech processing capabilities of SN 160 or IP 161. SN 160 or IP 161 preferably provides the recorded name to the called telephone station 122 between the call waiting indicators as described herein.

According to an alternative of the above embodiment, when the caller at calling telephone station 142 speaks his or her name, the spoken name can be directly provided to the customer at called telephone station 122 through central office 140 and SSP 120. The name is preferably provided between the call waiting indicators as described herein.

In accordance with a further alternative embodiment, the step of obtaining information associated with the calling telephone station (step 220, FIG. 4) further comprises the following steps. When the user input directions, as described above, are transmitted to calling telephone station 142 (step 236, FIG. 7), additional user input instructions can be transmitted to calling telephone station 142. The additional user input instructions can request the calling party to provide additional information relating to the handling of and/or the content of the information associated with the calling telephone station 142. These directions preferably include requests for information from the calling party regarding the priority of the message to be delivered to called telephone station 122. For example, if the caller believes that the message is urgent, the caller may enter appropriate instructions that enable the SN 160 or IP 161 to generate standard or customized messages that are included in the information associated with calling

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telephone station 142 that is transmitted to called telephone station 122 (step 270, FIG. 4). The user can, for example, utilize a dual-tone-multi-frequency (DTMF) signal to provide information as known by those skilled in the art. This alternative can be implemented in conjunction with the methods depicted in FIGS. 6 and 7 and described herein.

In accordance with a further alternative embodiment, the step of obtaining information associated with calling telephone station 142 (step 206, FIG. 4) further comprises the following steps. When SSP 120 determines that called telephone station 122 is busy and generates a query to SCP 150 requesting call control information, SCP 150 identifies and returns call control information to SSP 120. The call control information directs SSP 120 to generate instructions that ask the calling party at calling telephone station 142 to speak his or her name. The instructions are sent to a caller at calling telephone station 142 without attempting to locate a name associated with the telephone number in a database. The spoken name can be recorded or delivered as described above.

According to a preferred embodiment as depicted in FIG. 8, SSP 120 preferably generates the call waiting indicator comprising a tone or other similar indicator that is transmitted to called telephone station 122 to signify the start of the call waiting message (step 252, FIG. 8). The call path of the previous call is temporarily interrupted to temporarily place the previous call on hold (step 254) while the SN 160 or IP 161 automatically transmits an audible representation of the name associated with a caller at calling telephone station 142 to called telephone station 122 (step 256). SN 160 or IP 161 implements the text to speech module 164 to generate an audible representation of the name associated with calling telephone station 142. The audible representation of the name is preferably transmitted to called telephone station 122 within a predetermined amount of time after the call waiting indicator is transmitted. The previous call is restored after the name has been transmitted to called telephone station 122 (step 258). SSP 120 preferably generates a second call waiting indicator comprising a tone or other similar indicator that is sent to called telephone station 122 (step 260). The second call waiting indicator is preferably transmitted to called telephone station 122 within a predetermined amount of time after the name is transmitted. According to an alternative embodiment, the steps of transmitting a call waiting indicator (step 250, FIG. 4, steps 252, 260, FIG. 8) comprise transmitting a plurality of tones to called telephone station 122. According to a further alternative embodiment, the call waiting indicators are generated by SN 160 or IP 161 and transmitted to called telephone station 122.

According to an alternate embodiment, the information associated with calling telephone station 142, described in conjunction with FIGS. 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 comprises the identity of a caller at calling telephone station 142 and the telephone number associated with calling telephone station 142.

The present embodiments provide an efficient and effect method and system for providing an audible call waiting notification to a customer who is busy on a previous call. The present embodiments notify the customer that a current call is waiting in an effective manner that reduces confusion. Confusion is reduced by the combination of audible call waiting indicators and an audible representation of information associated with the calling telephone station. Additionally, both the indicator and the representation of the information can be provided automatically without significant delay and without any input from the caller.

It is to be understood that a wide range of changes and modifications to the embodiments described above will be apparent to those skilled in the art and are contemplated. It is

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therefore intended that the foregoing detailed description be regarded as illustrative rather than limiting, and that it be understood that it is the following claims, including all equivalents, that are intended to define the spirit and scope of the invention.

What invention claimed is:

1. A method for providing information about a calling party to a called party, the method comprising:

at a network element, obtaining information about the calling party when a communication device of the called party is unavailable, wherein obtaining information about the calling party includes directing the calling party to speak their name and recording a spoken name;

notifying the called party that the calling party is attempting to contact the called party, wherein notifying the called party comprises transmitting an audible call waiting indicator to the called party; and

the network element automatically transmitting the spoken name to the called party after the called party is notified that the calling party is attempting to contact the called party, wherein automatically transmitting the spoken name comprises transmitting an audible version of an identity of the calling party and a telephone number of the calling party to the called party without receiving an input from the called party.

2. The method of claim **1**, wherein obtaining information about the calling party comprises

obtaining an identity of the calling party and a telephone number of the calling party.

3. The method of claim **1**, further comprising:

determining whether the communication device of the called party is unavailable prior to obtaining information about the calling party.

4. The method of claim **1**, further comprising:

connecting the called party and the calling party in response to receipt of an instruction from the called party.

5. A non-transitory computer-readable storage medium comprising a set of instructions for providing information about a calling party to a called party, the set of instructions to direct a processor to perform acts of:

obtaining information about the calling party when a communication device of the called party is unavailable, wherein obtaining information about the calling party includes directing the calling party to speak their name and recording a spoken name;

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notifying the called party that the calling party is attempting to contact the called party, wherein notifying the called party comprises transmitting an audible call waiting indicator to the called party; and

automatically transmitting the spoken name to the called party after the called party is notified that the calling party is attempting to contact the called party, wherein automatically transmitting the spoken name comprises transmitting an audible version of an identity of the calling party and a telephone number of the calling party to the called party without receiving an input from the called party.

6. The non-transitory computer-readable storage medium of claim **5**, further comprising a set of instructions to direct a processor to perform acts of:

determining whether the communication device of the called party is unavailable prior to obtaining information about the calling party.

7. A system for providing information about a calling party to a called party, the system comprising:

a network element operative to:

obtain information about the calling party, wherein obtaining information about the calling party includes directing the calling party to speak their name and recording a spoken name;

notifying the called party that the calling party is attempting to contact the called party, wherein notifying the called party comprises transmitting an audible call waiting indicator to the called party; and

automatically transmit the spoken name to the called party after the called party is notified that the calling party is attempting to contact the called party, wherein automatically transmitting the spoken name comprises transmitting an audible version of an identity of the calling party and a telephone number of the calling party to the called party without receiving an input from the called party.

8. The system of claim **7**, wherein the network element is further operative to determine whether the called party's communication device is unavailable.

9. The system of claim **7**, wherein the network element is further operative to connect a call between the calling party and the called party after transmitting the spoken name to the called party.

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